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MEMORY.*

BY REV. W. HUME CAMPBELL.

IN speaking to you this afternoon on what is a very wide and a very fascinating subject, I must make two prefatory remarks to explain my purpose and my plan. I am very well aware that I am addressing many who knew more about this subject than I can tell them, before I was born, and all I shall have to say will be like asking them to sit down and let me teach them their alphabet again. But on the plan of the conventional sermon I divide my hearers into two classes, those who study and those who don't. In my idea the P.N.E.U. is especially started for the sake of the last class, in order to bring within their reach useful and practical information of which they would otherwise remain in ignorance. I specially address myself to these this afternoon. Students can find out everything for themselves, and if I ignore them it is only because they can do very well without my aid. At the same time I am glad to see them, because I hope they will give us the benefit of their thought in the discussion. I only profess to open the subject and direct it on certain lines, and then I hope you will correct and develop what I may say.

One word as to my plan. The difficulty in dealing with a subject like this is to know what to leave out, and one has to draw up a hard and fast plan and omit all sorts of interesting topics, just because they do not fall in with the plan. There is, for instance, the very wide subject of the connection between mind and body, the physical basis of Memory, the effect of varying conditions of health, and so on. All that I am compelled to pass by on the other side, because it is sufficient for my purpose to say that the bodily condition influences the mind very powerfully; although an abnormally active memory may exist in connection with a diseased body, yet a healthy memory can only exist in connection with a healthy body. Then, again, such a definition of Memory as I shall endeavour to arrive at will not pretend to be ultimate or comprehensive. It will just be the barest possible outline consistent with the amount we shall need to know for practical use. The plan that I have laid down for myself is first of all to try and arrive at a conclusion of what Memory is, how it works, what its value is, and then to make some general remarks as to the bearing of our conclusions on the education of children. It is rather with fear and trembling that I venture to use a blackboard. I hope my hearers will not think I am treating them like Board School children. The fact is it will help me by giving you a practical illustration of one of the great laws of Memory, that what the eye sees is more easily remembered than what the ear hears. Stated in general terms the law is that the higher the sense the more easily can we recall its impressions. We can recall the appearance of a flower much more easily than we can recall its smell, and we can remember a house we have seen more easily than one we have only had described to us. Similarly, if I may venture to write our chief conclusions on the board you will find that you will remember them far better than if I only told you, and I hope those who are what I may call amateur teachers will take a hint when they find a difficulty in making their pupils remember what they are taught.

Now for the question : What is Memory ?

The conventional way to begin would be by defining Memory and then explaining my definition by means of examples. Those, however, who are teachers will tell me that is the wrong end to begin. If we are teaching a new rule, *e.g.*, in arithmetic, we do not begin by making the child learn the rule and then press it home by examples. We begin with the examples, working them out step by step before the child—the child, where possible, suggesting each step, and then, when sufficient examples have been worked out, the child can see the rule for himself, and what is more than seeing, understand and apply it.

You, who are teachers, will tell me we ought to work on the same scientific principles this afternoon. We ought to work up to our definition from our examples. What shall we take as an example? Seeing you here to-day, reminds me of the last time you came to our house. I remember the lecturer, and how he read to us a valuable paper on “The Psychology of Childhood.” We must investigate this power of recollection. What is Memory? Is it an organ like heart or lungs? or is it a process, like digestion and thought? You will answer at once: Memory is not an organ; it is, viewed from one point, a process, from another, a faculty. Then, what are its operations? As I think of the last time you met here, I have in my mind's eye a little picture of the scene, and I cannot recall the event without that mind picture. We might illustrate this process by photography. The landscape falls on the lens—in this case the eye, is focussed on the ground glass, and is impressed upon a highly sensitized plate—in this case the brain—and after due preparation it can be used at any time with the complete picture upon it. We may then define Memory, as far as remembering scenes is concerned, as “a process by which mental pictures are reproduced.” But all Memory is not picture work. We may remember a tune we have never seen on paper, the scent of a rose, the taste of an orange, the coldness of iron. The fact is, our knowledge comes through any one of our five senses; every impression leaves some trace behind it, and Memory is just the “recollecting” of those impressions.

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* A Lecture delivered to the Reading branch of the Parents' National Educational Union at Merton House, Reading, May 31st, 1896.

Even now we have not got to an end of our definition. We must be able to say, what brings back these impressions?

We may define an engine as “a machine which moves,” but that is not enough. We must say whether it moves by steam, or water, or hand, or electricity. The Memory is a process, but what sets that process in motion?

If Memory is often a string of pictures like slides in a magic lantern, have we the control over them of the exhibitor of the lantern, or are we as helpless to control as the people at the back of the room?

Let us answer this question by going back to our examples. What made me, when I came in, remember your previous visit? Was it not, that being the same body of people, one visit is so strongly *associated* with another, that this one inevitably suggests the other? If I remind you of your homes, a whole train of Memory comes into play—the house, the street, the garden, the family, the general rooms, your

own private room. Memory brings back all these pictures at my first suggestion, because they are all tied together, linked together like carriages on a train, by *association*, and where one goes the others naturally follow.

Now we are in a position to define Memory. “Memory is a process or faculty by which past sense impressions are recalled in obedience to the laws of association.”

You must be quite tired by now of hunting definitions, so I will change my method. I will imagine you are asking me: Why has one man a good Memory and another a bad one? Why does my friend remember all he reads, while I remember hardly anything? I think our definition will supply us with an answer. If Memory is bad, it will be either the fault of the “impressions,” or the fault of the “associations.”

I.—*Impressions.* If we are to remember, our impressions must be both deep and clear. They must be deep. Read Austin's “Jurisprudence” and a chapter of Ian Maclaren's last book. Which will leave the deepest impression? The latter, of course, because it *interests* you. The amount of interest we have in what we are doing is one of the chief factors in determining how much we shall remember. The greater the interest the deeper the impression. But you say: “I want to remember a lot of things that I cannot take an interest in—facts and figures, names and faces.” Well, then, you must work on the blacksmith's plan. If he wants to flatten a piece of iron, and has not a hammer heavy enough to do it with one blow, he uses a smaller hammer, and gives it repeated blows. If you want to remember what is dull, you must do it by frequent repetition. Those who want to be adepts, *e.g.*, at chemistry, in which much depends on the memory, often write out what they want to remember, and fasten it up where they will often see it. But an impression must be something more than deep if it is to be good. It must be very *clear in its outlines.* There must be close attention at the time when the impression is made. My friend who forgets his book probably never attended to what he read. His thoughts wandered everywhere, and so his impressions are all blurred and indistinct.

Here then is the secret of a deep and a clear impression:—
(1) Interest. (2) Repetition. (3) Attention.

II.—*Associations.* But failure to remember may be due to want of power to recall impressions. They may have been deep and clear, but nothing recalls them. We hear numbers of stories which interest us, we recognize them when we hear them again, but we could not recall them when we wanted to tell them. Why not? Because when we heard them we did not "link" them on to something else. Nothing had the power to suggest them. There were no "associations" which could recall them to mind. We want not only the impressions but the power to recall them. That power depends upon the amount we think about, and *arrange* what we want to remember.

A good Memory then is one which can recall its impressions quickly and accurately; it depends on interest, repetition, attention, and arrangement.

Now that we have found out what we need to know about Memory, we can pass on to the subject of training. A good many people seem to think we are born with a good or bad Memory, and as we are born so must we die. There are no doubt differences in people, due to natural and hereditary tendencies, but when there is no positive physical disease to affect the brain, Memory may be made a very good servant. We cannot, indeed, hope to rival Sir Walter Scott. Lockhart tells us that James Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd, was lamenting in Scott's presence that a long ballad of his had been destroyed, which he had composed many years before, and he could only recall the subject, and one or two fragments. Sir Walter, to whom Hogg had read it after composing it, said with a smile: "Take your pencil, Jamie, and I'll dictate it to you, word for word," which was done accordingly.

Even Scott complains that he had no control over this wonderful memory; it would always remember what it liked rather than what he wanted.

It is all very well for us to remember the plots of novels and be able to entertain friends with hosts of stories, but if Memory stays by the fire at home while we go to business, if we cannot control it so as to make a good Memory help us in our life work, we are not much better off than the man who has a bad one.

How are we to control it? We must train those different faculties which go to make up Memory.

(1) Widen your *interests*, so as to have a larger field under command, for every new interest presents many new links for associations.

(2) Go over and over what it is most important to remember until the impression has become very deep.

(3) Cultivate intense concentration. Learn by exercise to control your thoughts so that they cannot wander about at their will to your utter discomfort.

(4) Think about all you read. See how it enlarges your knowledge. Link the new on to the old. Take time about it and try and *arrange* all you want to remember. Make the links of association between new and old as strong as possible.

Now just a little about children and their Memories. On this subject I hope a good deal of useful information will be elicited in the discussion from those who have had more practical experience than I have had.

The first germs of Memory in a child begin very soon, when he recognizes after an interval something he has seen before. I say "recognize," not "recollect," because the child cannot at a very early age recall impressions, but when the same impressions are repeated they strike the child as not new. He recognizes them. The same distinction obtains with us. We meet a stranger; we try after we have separated to recollect his face. We cannot; but when we see him again we "recognize" the face as the one we could not "recollect." The child's first great stride in education is made at about six months old, when he begins to associate words with things and to understand simple language, many months before he can use it. For the first years of life the parent or teacher has to leave education very largely to the spontaneous activity of the child. Our chief power lies in controlling the child's surroundings. Most people have no idea of the enormous amount of work done by the child unconsciously during the early years of his existence. When we remember that language itself is nothing more than a huge organized system of association in which sounds and things which have absolutely no inherent affinity are inseparably welded together, it will give some idea of the first task that lies before the child.

The time when the Memory really begins to be available from the teacher's point of view is at about seven years. I do not say it is useless to try and teach before this. Not so; but from seven to ten the Memory becomes more or less perfectly amenable to discipline.

Now supposing we sit down either to learn ourselves or to teach our children, what do we find? We find that although Memory, as I have defined it, seems a very simple uniform kind of thing, yet it is really very far from being so. We find our children differ in every possible way. We find that a child who has a marvellous Memory for music has none at all for names of flowers, and a child who can tell you all he has seen and heard can remember but little of what he reads. Some people suggest that the brain is not a uniform mass always operating as an indivisible whole, but that it is divided into infinite compartments we might almost call them, if the metaphor is not pressed, each one with its own function and its own allotted branch of knowledge, so that different branches of knowledge are localized each in its own division of the brain. I hope someone who has studied the brain will tell us their opinion about this. It would certainly explain why Memory is strong in one subject and weak in another. I am aware that natural taste and natural gifts would be responsible for a good deal, but I question if that alone would be an adequate explanation. The practical outcome of this variety is that the teacher's inclination is to develop the child along the line of least resistance, *i.e.*, if the child has a good memory for music and none for form and colour, it is least trouble to drop drawing and painting and simply develop the musical gifts. It is well, however, to remember that the child needs least help where he finds most natural attraction, and then it becomes the teacher's duty to try and widen the child's interest, to a certain extent to develop what is the weak point and introduce proportion into the studies and thence into the development of mind and character of his charge.

I have kept you much too long, but if I may say one word about a very important branch of our subject I will conclude immediately after. I mean the subject of learning by heart. A bad teacher makes the child learn nearly everything by heart. The result is that many who feel they are good teachers determine that the child shall learn nothing by heart. Which is right? Of course, neither are. The question has been a good deal discussed, and yet it does not seem to me difficult, with the help of Sir J. G. Fitch, to arrive at a common sensible answer. Let us work up to it from examples. I am teaching the history of America. Shall I make my pupil learn the names of all the States' presidents? Certainly not. It would be useless knowledge, of no special interest, and if at any time he wanted to know it he would remember where to find it. With the kings of England the case would be different, because there is a special interest in knowing them. I am teaching chemistry. Shall I make my pupil learn off the elements with their symbols and atomic weights? Yes; all the symbols, and the atomic weights of the most important, because he wants to know in a moment and not to have the bother of frequently looking back. Shall I make him learn poetry? Emphatically yes, the best, for I want not only to stock his mind with thoughts, but I also want him to have at command the noblest forms in which those thoughts have been expressed. Now, can we lay down any rule for our guidance? I think so. Speaking generally, when important knowledge cannot be arrived at by reason, such as, *e.g.*, formulæ, dates, and, in some cases, definitions and grammatical rules, or where the form in which the knowledge is expressed is worth preserving, as in poetry, scripture, then he shall learn it by heart; but I will not let him learn by heart anything which could be arrived at by a process of reasoning, or which being of no importance or interest would merely cumber the Memory, and whenever wanted might easily be looked up.

"Savoir par cœur n'est pas savoir," said Montaigue. Knowing by heart is not knowing. Like most aphorisms it is only partly true, but at least it witnesses to this, that important and valuable though the Memory is, yet Memory is not mind, and the teacher who has a really high estimate of his really noble office, will not seek merely to cram his pupil's intellectual stomach with ill-digested or indigestible food; he will not be so short-sighted or forgetful of his pupil's real interests as to labour merely to develop that faculty which yields the most immediate and most showy results; he will use Memory only as the serving-maid to judgment and reason; he will love details only because of their power to illustrate principles, and he will train his children not only to remember arithmetic and geography and history, but to understand also how all the multitudinous phenomena which these and other sciences present, may, by the truly scientific and truly reverent mind, be reduced within the limits of a few cardinal laws, laws which he first encounters as a child in the world of matter, but will find in later years have their exact analogies and counterparts both in the world of mind and the world of spirit. In seeking knowledge you will remember "she is the second, not the first," and the key-note of all your teaching will be the prayer of the bereaved poet:—

"Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before,

But vaster. We are fools and slight.
We mock thee when we do not fear:
But help thy feeble ones to bear,
Help thy vain worlds to bear thy light."

THE BEECH-TREE'S ANNAL.

WINTER PENSIONERS.

It seems a dreary, melancholy season, when in November the rain streams down before a south-west wind, and the very last leaves of summer flutter down with the weight of it. The garden grass-plat that yesterday was swept, is to-day patterned over with ruddy brown spots. The great beech-trees that stand over against it, and stretch—a little grove that shelters the drive—away to the gateway, are now getting bared for the winter; they rise against the grey-white sky like a forest of masts and spars, while a single hornbeam amongst them shows as a delicate shimmer of green.

The yearly course of the trees is now almost over. Tightly do they wrap themselves up and prepare for the onslaughts of winter. And this is perhaps as good a time as any at which to recite the tale of the beeches. They have no calendar as we have, that stops short at December 31. Their course is rounded, as the earth's about the sun; there is neither beginning nor end to it. Even now, when the trees seem inert, they are not in reality so; they have but withdrawn their juices, and those elements manufactured by the leaves from the summer sunshine, into the interior, there to be stored and transfused into vital forces that shall result in the outburst of new leaves and fresh flowers of future springs. Even whilst the now "detruded leaf" sat firmly on its perch, and as long ago as July last, did the bud that lay below it hold the future year's leaves complete, all ready in miniature (yet large enough to be made out with a simple lens), and waiting, in delicate wrappings of bract, for the far-off time of unfolding.

How complex is Nature! How interlocked are her manifold forms! Here is the beech-tree, whose vital movements are actuated and controlled by the earth's rotation round the sun, getting its food from soil and air; while